

The COSMOPOLITAN

A Resurrection of the past

The Casa de Bandini/Cosmopolitan Hotel boasts an extensive history with its distinctive architectural character and association with significant people and events in the state's history. Originally built 1827-1829 by Don Juan Bandini as a family residence the Casa de Bandini is one of the most noteworthy historic buildings in the state.

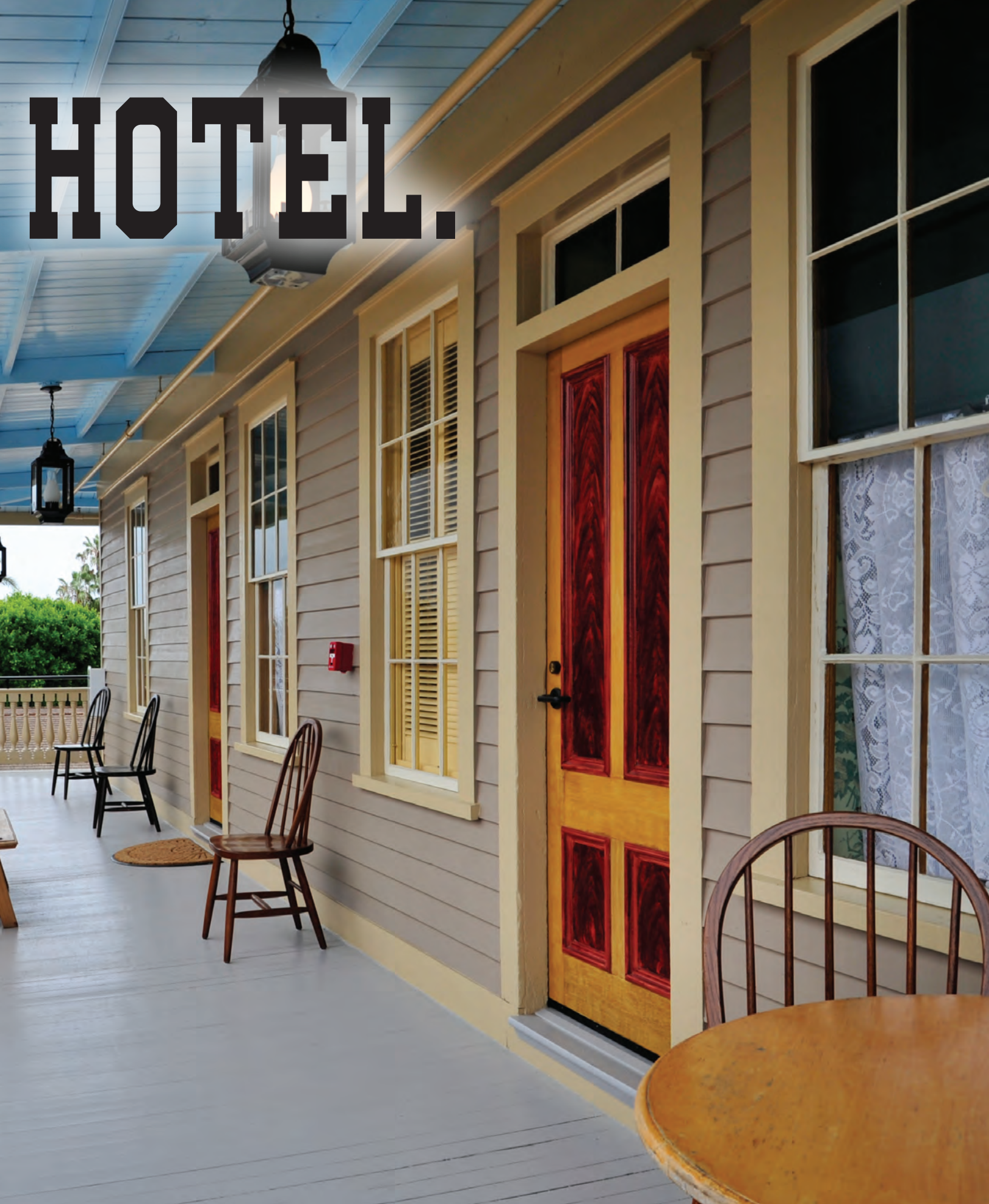
Now after a 6.5 million dollar rehabilitation and restoration this historic landmark has been returned to its historic appearance as the 1869 Cosmopolitan Hotel, fulfilling a 50-year goal of historians and many San Diegans to restore the 19th-century landmark and recapture some of San Diego's most important architectural legacy.

Open once again as a hotel, restaurant, and saloon, it is notable for its appointments of American antique furnishings and decorative items from the 1860s and 70s throughout the building, including its ten guest rooms. The restaurant serves regional cuisine, using locally grown and produced ingredients to create traditional foods of the 1870s, keeping in mind the modern palate.

Preservationists have been waiting since the 1960s to see the building restored," said Bruce Coons, who served as historic design consultant

The upper verandah facing the Estudillo House and plaza retains 98% of its original siding, doors, door trim and windows. Used as storage rooms for kitchen and other supplies in past years the ten rooms on the second floor are once again hotel rooms. Photo by Sandé Lollis





HOTEL.



Top The courtyard side during restoration shows the original Bandini adobe walls and the second floor with its original 1869 siding. *Bottom* The doublewide doorway from Bandini period with original lintel, looking into the dining room with Seeley period wainscot visible. Photos by Bruce Coons

on the project. “Not only is it one of the most important 19th-century buildings in the state, but one of the most important restorations ever done in San Diego because there was so much original fabric still here including trim, doors, door fenestrations, and windows.”

Nini Minovi, an archaeologist who was one of the integral members of the restoration team, explains to visitors to the site how the three-year project involved not only a traditional archaeological excavation of the site, but also a peeling back of the layers of the building’s exterior renovations from the previous decades. Cement and tile hid portions of an original stairway; stucco concealed three- and four-foot-thick original adobe walls and redwood clapboard siding; fireplaces that had been walled up were reopened for the guest rooms.

The rebirth of this building that had been lost for so long to generations of San Diegans is cause for celebration and it is also a call to action to San Diegans who want to see more of these large-scale historic restorations. It will be up to each of us to make the venue an economic success by visiting often, and bringing friends, family and out of town visitors to enjoy and marvel at what can be done when the will to do the right thing is present. The Old Town San Diego State Historic Park (OTSDSHP) should be applauded for taking a difficult stand against an invasive *(Continued on page 10)*



Above The courtyard after restoration, still lacking the final rose beige coat of scored plaster on the first level. The original 1870's paint colors on all woodwork. Photo by Sandé Lollis

“This is an unprecedented historic restoration, other buildings in the state rival its scale or size (over 10,000 American wood-framing construction techniques. It boasts a fabric and written and oral accounts left behind by previous



Located on the left side of the entrance hall, the sitting room was Bandini's former *sala*. Seeley enlarged the parlor into a “spacious sitting room with a fire” in order to serve meals and to provide a gathering place for guests, their family members, and visitors. By the early 1870s, as Albert and his wife Emily's social standing rose, the large room had become the town's community center. The tall multi-paned windows allowed ample light into the room, and like the bar, it had decorative redwood beaded wainscoting and window wells painted with an oak-grain faux finish. It also had a red brick fireplace with an arched trim and a tongue-and-groove Douglas fir floor. As the town social center, the room was the scene of family reunions, dances, Christmas parties, evening balls, and weddings.

Above The main dining room under restoration, weaving new floor boards with the original 1869 boards that could be salvaged. 85% original wainscot remains from the Cosmopolitan Hotel. Photo by Bruce Coons. **Right** The restored dining room with antique and reproduction period furniture, and chandeliers. Period paintings, all antiques, grace the walls, and the plaster medallions were reproduced from fragments found during excavations. The ceiling is painted in its original colors with walls papered in reproductions from samples found in the Pio Pico Adobe. Photo by Sandé Lollis



arguably the most important one currently in California. Few square feet) and blending of 19th-century Mexican adobe and rich and storied history, a history that is buried in the material generations.” Victor Walsh



Left Showing the faux wood graining in oak and crotch mahogany replicating what was found on the building itself and shown in 1870s photographs. *Right* One of ten restored guest rooms furnished with all antique furniture matching the original manifests ordered by Seeley for the Cosmopolitan in 1869. Period wallpaper and Nottingham lace curtains that were woven on antique looms complete the rooms. Photos by Sandé Lollis



Preliminary investigations revealed that most of the adobe walls on the first floor remained intact, except in the former kitchen facility, where moisture, condensation, and rodent infestation over the decades had severely damaged the adobe blocks. Approximately half the historic walls had to be rebuilt.

Important interior features, dating back to the building's heyday as a hotel, include the tongue-and-groove wainscoting and flooring, window wells and trim, and sections of ceiling lath on the first floor, much of the original stairway and walnut banister in the entryway, the brick fireplaces and remnants of finish plaster and woodwork on both floors, and many of the original doors, window sashes and cornices on the second-floor balcony.

Despite multiple alterations and major remodels, it has retained much of its historic 19th-century fabric and integrity, hidden beneath layers of stucco, decorative tile, and wrought iron. Cave Coutts, Jr. played an unintentional but instrumental role when he renovated the building in the 1930s. His work crews provided a virtual blueprint of the hotel's configuration by salvaging and reusing its materials. "In this respect state historian Victor Walsh says, "the building is a veritable museum piece of historic fabric."

Top The original saloon or bar area of the Cosmopolitan Hotel showcases an antique 1870s bar originally from Silver City, Idaho. *Right* The stairway was found under two inches of cement and tile. The handrail that had survived by having been screwed into modern wrought iron in previous remodels, was salvaged and reinstalled into its historic location. The left side was replicated from HABS drawings. The balusters and newel post were replicated. Photos by Sandé Lollis



(Continued from page 5) popular culture that had grown over the past years that not only obscured San Diego's significant place in history but hid our own unique architecture. Instead, its role and duty to all Californians as a state historic park were taken quite seriously,

and in doing so, the promise of the preservation and protection of the rich legacy of Old Town San Diego has been kept. ♦

This article and captions were written borrowing liberally from a recently completed extensive over 12,000-word history of the site by State Historian II Victor A. Walsh, and from conversations with

Side view showing the extent of the historic material uncovered during the restoration. Also a good view of the porch balustrades and steep pitched roof and chimney that were returned after being chopped off for the imitation hacienda look the building previously had. The only items left to be completed are the rose-beige scored plaster on the first floor and the painted stage office sign on the left corner of the building. Photo by Sandé Lollis



archeologist Nini Minovi, project manager for the State Department of Parks and Recreation Bill Mennell, and Bruce Coons who acted as historic consultant for the project. The historic report can be found in its entirety at www.sohosandiego.org/cosmohistory.htm.

To learn more go to <http://oldtowncosmopolitan.com/> and http://www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=24983

